

National Historic Parks News

CAIA71
- N13

8

Winter, 1972

Telling It Like It Was

3 1761 11765749 4



In Canada, the development of National Historic Parks and Sites is guided by a federal policy stipulating that "only sites and structures which illustrate the history of Canada in an exceptional way should be selected". To be designated of national historic importance a site or structure may be connected with a major historical event—military, social or cultural; an outstanding Canadian statesman or scientist; or a major archaeological discovery. But most important, the site or structure must also possess integrity: neither myth-makers nor legend-mongers need apply.

Though the facts of history remain constant, new ways of viewing them continue to evolve. What might be termed the modern concept of restoring and interpreting historic sites was introduced to North Americans at the turn of the century by George Francis Dow, secretary of the Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts. Borrowing his idea from the "period" rooms of the Swiss and Germans and from the outdoor folk museums of Sweden, Dow insisted that antiques should not be encased as museum curiosities but displayed in a natural, functional context.

Hence the restoration and more rarely the reconstruction of complete "historic" complexes. Within Canada's National Historic Parks system, the Fortress of Louisbourg in Nova Scotia and Lower Fort Gary in Manitoba are among those Parks which will ultimately simulate period communities populated by costumed tradespeople and townsfolk carrying out the daily chores: the blacksmith working at his forge, the housewife baking bread, soldiers carrying out military drill. Within the park complex the visitor is offered further insight into the site's history through exhibit pavilions containing scale models, copies of original plans, artifacts, and descriptive commentary.

Federal, provincial and municipal agencies are investing millions of dollars in the past—combining the professional skills of archaeologists, historians, restoration engineers, designers and curators to lift history from the textbook page.

A structural restoration, interior refurbishing, or costuming program must be built upon a solid foundation of archaeological and historical research. In the National Historic Sites Service, restoration engineers and curators work closely with historians and archaeologists. Information gleaned from the site is recorded in "as found" drawings. Archival documents and drawings, period newspapers, and artifacts unearthed on-site are carefully studied for a picture of past time and place. Using this composite historical blueprint, restoration experts draw up structural plans and the curator sets out to secure suitable furnishings, either civilian or military.

Inside the recently restored storehouse at Fort Langley, British Columbia, a student guide dressed in period style stands behind the counter to answer visitors' questions. The odours of leather, soap and petrol and the jumble of bales, boxes and barrels lend reality to the display. Except for some antique items, like irons and muskets, the "trade" goods are new as they would have been in the original storehouse.



St. Roch Restoration

Nearly three decades ago the 104-foot schooner St. Roch plied her way through the Arctic's worst. She was battered by jagged ice floes, blasted by driving snow and bitter winds. Today she sits in serene dignity berthed at Vancouver's Maritime Museum as children race around her deck and peer into her dim skylight.

"Did they float this boat in the ocean?" a three-footer asks the guide on duty. "How many dinghies did it have?" "Why can't we go inside?"

The story of the St. Roch, her teals, skipper and crew is partly told in the modern display of photographs, maps and artifacts installed alongside her berth by the National Historic Sites Service. The rest will unfold over the next three years as restoration experts from the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development return the ship to her likeness when she steamed through Lancaster Sound north of Baffin Island in the summer of 1944—forcing her way through the Northwest Passage in a single season.

Above deck and below the St. Roch will be refurbished with gear, furnishings, clothing and cargo similar to what she carried on that remarkable 86-day journey. The aim—to transform her from a sterile museum piece to a "living" ship reflecting the personalities of her crew as she did during that summer many years ago.

Over the years since '44, changes minor and major have altered her appearance. At one point her superstructure was removed and a small wheelhouse was erected on her deck. To recreate the 1944 configuration the main mast will be moved from bow to stern, and a much enlarged wheelhouse, galley and sleeping area will be constructed.

In nearly 17 years of inactivity her innards have been slowly consumed by dry rot, and last November work began on treating and repairing the decay that has destroyed much of her stern.

Following a lengthy drying-out process, the after deck and stern timbers were sprayed with a phenol and alcohol fungicide. The chemical compound is designed to fill the sponge-like surface of the decayed wood, leaving the exterior dry for adhesion of a resin and chopped fibreglass

coating. While the resin seeps into the porous wood, the fibers bind the surface like reinforcing rods in concrete. Wasted areas and cavities are filled with a polyester and putty mixture that hardens to the strength of wood.

Next year construction of the superstructure will begin. Masts and rigging, fore-castle and engine room will be restored. And finally, fittings and furnishings will be bought or recreated and installed. By April 1974, the project will be completed at a cost of over \$300,000.

In the meanwhile, engineers planning reconstruction of the superstructure are trying to amass as much background material as possible. Enough drawings and photographs exist to give a complete picture of the exterior, but of the St. Roch's interior little data is available.

Logs kept during the voyage of '44 along with skipper Henry Larsen's book *The Big Ship* tell about events of the trip rather than the ship's appearance. More helpful are black and white photos from the RCMP archives and Henry Larsen's private collection.

A 15-minute colour film, shot by the Royal Canadian Navy and Larsen during the '44 trip yield details about her forward not found in any other photos. Her hull was blue-grey; her varnished fir masts, red; she bore a square crow's nest, a varnished



wood "dodger" or bulwark, and varnished trim more typical of a Norwegian vessel than a Canadian one—the imprint of her Norwegian-born skipper.

But recapturing the atmosphere of the St. Roch during her Arctic passage means many more precise details about her furnishings and her crew. Of the 11 crewmen who guided the St. Roch through the Passage in '44, six are alive and five have been located. The men are scattered from San Francisco, California to Kamchatka in the Yukon, and to pinpoint their whereabouts took six months' effort.

The restoration team is largely depending on the memories of these men for an accurate picture of the ship's interior. What exactly did the radio operator's cabin look like? What sort of wood panelling lined the cabin walls? What kind of reading material did the bookshelves hold?

Interviews with several of the crew of '44 have already helped to produce measured drawings of the '44 configuration and added many small but significant details about the fore-castle, deck and galley. These will form a basis for restoration specifications. Ex-crewman James Diplock put the job in a nutshell when he conceded, "It's going back a long time to little things".



Wood "dodger" or bulwark, and varnished trim more typical of a Norwegian vessel than a Canadian one—the imprint of her Norwegian-born skipper.

But recapturing the atmosphere of the St. Roch during her Arctic passage means many more precise details about her furnishings and her crew. Of the 11 crewmen who guided the St. Roch through the Passage in '44, six are alive and five have been located. The men are scattered from San Francisco, California to Kamchatka in the Yukon, and to pinpoint their whereabouts took six months' effort.

The restoration team is largely depending on the memories of these men for an accurate picture of the ship's interior. What exactly did the radio operator's cabin look like? What sort of wood panelling lined the cabin walls? What kind of reading material did the bookshelves hold?

Every year between 1928 and 1939, the St. Roch travelled among the grinding ice floes of the Arctic and during this period spent eight winters in the ice. In 1940 she began her first famous voyage through the Northwest Passage and in October 1942 gained great renown as the first ship to make the trip from the Pacific to the Atlantic through the Arctic Ocean.

An extensive refit at Halifax in 1944 gave the St. Roch a more powerful engine and a larger wheelhouse, enhancing her performance and appearance. "The Ugly Duckling", as her skipper affectionately called her proved to be as tough and sturdy a vessel as could have been designed.

That same year she began her second conquest of the Northwest Passage and upon completing it became the first vessel to make the treacherous trip in both directions.

Acknowledging his debt to those who had gone before him, Henry Larsen, skipper of the St. Roch wrote, "Sometimes during our passage I fancied I could see the tall majestic ships that had preceded us in most of these waters over a hundred years ago. Tribute must also be paid to these early explorers whose sacrifices and exploits blazed most of the trail we took".

The next ship through the Northwest Passage was the HMCS Labrador in the mid-50's. She was followed by the Canadian Coast Guard Ship Louis B. St. Laurent which escorted the American supertanker Manhattan in 1969.



If the restoration of Motherwell House, Saskatchewan, is an outstanding individual, efforts are made to acquire some of its original belongings. If few or none are attainable, then period furnishings which reflect his status, in life and his personal attitudes are used. Some are taken from the reserve collection of the Service, others purchased, some are especially reproduced, faithful to the design of period originals. Each artifact, be it a spoon or a structure, must have the same appearance it would have had during the period being interpreted. Damaged furniture is refinished, moth-eaten clothing mended, and rusted firearms cleaned by staff conservators and technicians.

When dealing with a public figure, detailed information about his belongings can occasionally be learned from accounts compiled after his death. Such was the case for an 18th-century governor of Louisiana, Du Quesnel, whose goods were itemized and sold to cover his gambling debts. The list of his possessions, found in the Paris Archives, proved an invaluable guide to restoring his private chambers at the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic Park. As a result, the reconstructed rooms are furnished with the sort of articles they would have held more than 200 years ago: the most complete collection of 18th-century French provincial and colonial furniture in North America.

When planning the restoration of Motherwell House, Saskatchewan, homestead of pioneer politician William R. Motherwell, curator Reg Dixon approached Motherwell's surviving relatives to help him reconstruct a picture of the twelve-room home. In this exceptional case, many original pieces were donated to the Service by Motherwell's friends and family and will be placed where they stood in Motherwell's lifetime.

Pat Lockwood is the curator responsible for furnishing the engineer's cottage at Lower Fort Garry National Historic Park, Selkirk, Manitoba. When fully furnished next summer the cottage will depict the cramped living quarters of engineer Elie Abel and his wife, mother, and three children, circa 1870. Miss Lockwood defines the problem of furnishing an historic structure as one of

functionalism—the restoration helps to re-create the atmosphere of an operational situation rather than a static display of period artifacts. To create this impression in the engineer's cottage meant acquiring a vast variety of household items. "Some items," comments Miss Lockwood, "weren't terribly difficult to obtain due to the particular period to which the house was being restored and the middle-class status of the engineer's family. It would be quite different when dealing with a well-traveled political figure who had the opportunity and means to acquire goods of greater variety and higher quality."

Things old and Canadian have gained in popular appeal over the past decade with the result that private collectors and museum curators alike are jostling elbows to buy "Canadiana." This interest has also led to the manufacture of reproduction antiques, often competitively priced with originals and often indistinguishable except to the trained eye.

When shopping for antiques, the curator looks for minutia that will assist in determining the object's authenticity and date. Glassware, for example, is scrutinized for clarity, wear marks on the base, and evidence of manufacturing technique. The presence of a pontil mark is especially helpful in dating glass. (The pontil mark is the scar at the bottom of a blown glass container left by the rod used to hold the vessel during the finishing process. After the 1860s a basket-like holder was used instead of the metal rod and the pontil mark disappeared.)

High quality clear glass containing lead was common until the 1860s when a cheaper new formula based on a soda lime combination was developed. To the naked eye the glass based on soda lime looks very much like the lead glass, but when subjected to short-wave ultra-violet light the lime goes yellow, the lead ice-blue. Not every National Historic Site lends itself to restoration. Queenston Heights on the Niagara frontier features a walking tour with site markers to tell the dramatic story of the battle that was fought there between British and Americans 160 years ago.

At Baddeck, Nova Scotia, a modern museum displays Alexander Graham Bell's personal memorabilia alongside the impressive array of inventions he contributed to the fields of medicine, aeronautical engineering and communications. The architectural design of the building, echoing a theme of Bell's research at Baddeck, is based on the tetrahedral form on which he designed kites to test the principles of flight. Six miles southwest of Lethbridge, Alberta, a plaque-bearing marker overlooks Whoop-Up coulee, today a peaceful grassy valley. A little over a century ago it was the site of Fort Whoop-Up, earliest and most successful of the "whiskey" forts built by the Americans from Fort Benton, Montana, to trade whiskey for Canadian buffalo hides. Roul-ing the whiskey-runners was one of the first tasks of the North West Mounted Police in making way for peaceful settlement of the Canadian west. Now, all that remains of those turbulent times are wheel ruts left by the whiskey-laden wagons.

There are many ways to tell a story.

1 Bellevue National Historic Park at Kingston, Ontario, features Bellevue House, one of the earliest and finest examples of Italianate villa architecture in Canada. Restored and furnished as it might have been when Sir John A. Macdonald lived there for a brief period, the house contains some Macdonald memorabilia but also portrays the home life of the rising middle class in mid-19th century Canada.

2 Jane Thompson, artifact cataloguer in the artifacts laboratory of the National Historic Sites Service, takes the dimensions of a piece of tableware unearthed by archaeologists at Fort Basseur/Northern Port.

3 At Fort Langley, British Columbia, the only structure dating from the fur trade era of the 1850s has been refurbished as a storehouse. The two-storey dressed log structure is of the post-and-rail construction typical of northern trade posts.

4 Macdonald's study, located off the oblong windows in the lower. Dictionary on top of the bookcase and some papers on the desk belonged to Macdonald.



British Soldiery in Canada

The National Historic Sites Service is caretaker for many British fortifications in Canada, ranging from the complexities of Halifax Citadel to the grassy slopes marking the remnants of Fort Amherst, Prince Edward Island. The task of restoring some of these posts has uncovered a number of problems beyond finding out how many feet of planking were used to erect a structure.

What were the men garriotted at these posts like? What did they wear, and what did they eat? How did they spend their off-duty time? To provide a working framework for site archaeologists and restoration experts alike, a current project is being carried out by Carol Whitfield of the historical research section. This major study which took over two years of research in the archives of Canada and England will delve into the social history of the British military garrisons during their 112-year occupation of Canada between 1759 and 1871.

There are many reasons why historians take the dimensions of a piece of tableware unearthed by archaeologists at Fort Basseur/Northern Port.

British army records are usually reports of improper behaviour, as this interfered with smooth operation of the army. There are thousands of accounts of courts-martial for desertion and drunkenness, giving us clues to the off-duty activities of the men. Requisitions for medicines and surgical equipment reveal what diseases the men suffered and treatment administered, yielding a glimpse of the living standards the army maintained for rank and file.

So much for the revelations of bureaucratic red tape. Research is further hampered by the scarcity of diaries and memoirs. The British private was usually illiterate—it was not until the Napoleonic Wars that the Horse Guards provided schools where for a pittance the men might learn to read and write. Those few privates who did leave diaries dwell on the appearance of the Canadian countryside and on the occasional incident that broke the monotony of garrison life. The everyday routine seemed too commonplace to mention.

Many of the officers, on the other hand, literate gentlemen as they were, did leave accounts of their lives in Canada. Whatever the private's daily routine was like, the officer's was not. They came from very different social classes and the difference in the size of their pay packets alone made it unlikely that they could or would share the same forms of recreation.

Although the common soldier was the mainstay of the British army, British recruiting practices of the 18th and 19th centuries were hardly conducive to attracting good and able-bodied men to the ranks.

The results of a survey taken in the 1840's shows why men entered the army, and sketches the sort of men found in the ranks of an average British regiment. The survey claims that out of a division of 120 soldiers, the following statistics would be borne out:

80 out of 120	Indigent—embarrassed labourers and mechanics out of employ who merely seek for support
2 out of 120	Indigent—respectable persons induced by misfortune or imprudence
16 out of 120	Idle—who consider a soldier's life an easy one
8 out of 120	Bad Characters—who fall back upon the army as a last resort
1 out of 120	Criminals—who seek to escape from the consequence of their offences
2 out of 120	Perverse Sons—who seek to grieve their parents
8 out of 120	Discontented and restless
1 out of 120	Ambitious
2 out of 120	Others

(From *Camp and Barrack Room: or the British Army as It is*, by J. MacKillop, staff sergeant of the 33rd Light Infantry, published in London, 1844)

To maintain order among the men, intensive military drills were carried out daily and severe military laws were established. Disobedience and "unsoldierlike conduct"—a term defined by the commanding officer of the regiment—met with harsh punishments ranging from lashes to branding to exile to death. Alexander Alexander, a Royal Artilleryman, wrote of flogging in the early 1800s:

"For petty misdemeanors I saw men every day punished with a severity I had never beheld exercised on the slaves in Carriacou. The first man I saw punished my heart was like to burst! I had hitherto only seen the pomp of war—the gloss and glitter of the army. A poor fellow of the 9th regiment, said to be a farmer's son in Suffolk, had the misfortune to be found asleep on his post. The fellow was tried by court-martial, and sentenced to be flogged; all the troops were paraded to witness the punishment."

The soldier stood stripped to the waist, in wind and a fleet, arms fixed above his head to the halberts, Alexander continues: "The soldier was a line-looking lad, and bore an excellent character in his regiment; his officers were much interested in his behalf,

and made great interest to him to the General. But all their pleading was in vain. The poor fellow got 225 lashes, but they were uncommonly severe. I saw the drum major strike a drummer to the ground for not using his strength sufficiently."

At length the surgeon intervened; the soldier was taken down and carried to the hospital where he died eight days later. Remarks Alexander, "It was the cold I think that killed him, for I have often seen 700 lashes inflicted but I never saw a man's back so horrible to look upon."

The officer class, on the other hand, led a more charmed existence. Officers were generally the second and third sons of wealthy aristocratic families, their names linked to past military engagements. (Through primogeniture the eldest was heir to his father's estate and his "career" was predetermined.) There were few socially acceptable career choices for the sons of an earl or marquis, and business wasn't one of them. The "suitable" career lay in the Church of England hierarchy, in Parliament or the army.

The army was a particularly popular choice. During the early part of the 18th century, dating parents and godparents bought their toddlers army commissions, increasing their contributions over the years so that by the time a lad reached the age of fifteen he had attained the rank of lieutenant without ever donning a uniform. Buying a commission, like buying blue chip stock, was a sound investment for the future. A man willing to barter away his rank of colonel, for example, could demand a good return in the fixed price for his rank, as well as under-the-counter "interest."

To advance his career, it also helped the officer to have well-placed friends in London to keep an eye on the military gazette for announcements of promotions, retirements and deaths. Each opening brought a flood of applications from ambitious buyers. It was not until a century ago, after the British army had left Canada, that the practice of purchasing commissions was abolished and all promotions were gained by merit.

All army ranks were bought back by the Crown, never to be sold again.

Published quarterly in French by the National and Historic Parks Branch under the authority of the Honorable Jean Chrétien, P.C., M.P., Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs

Articles and photographs may be reprinted with a credit line. Non-copyrighted photographs will be supplied on request.

Editor: Vivian Astorff

Conservation Group

Office of the Public Information Adviser

400 Laurier W., Ottawa

Design: Gottschalk & Ash Ltd.

